

# NEWS

From the County of San Bernardino  
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## Inland Empire counties testify against state fire tax

Representatives of San Bernardino and Riverside counties today opposed a new state tax that counties would have to collect to finance firefighting services provided by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

In addition to testifying at a Department of Forestry administrative hearing in Sacramento this afternoon, the counties met with a member of Gov. Schwarzenegger's staff to request that the tax be repealed.

The counties also submitted written opposition to the state fire tax on Monday, arguing that it is invalid because it was adopted last year by less than two-thirds of the state Legislature.

County leaders are hopeful that the tax will be eliminated when the state budget is adopted.

"The new state fire tax is misguided, inequitable, and discriminatory," said San Bernardino County 1<sup>st</sup> District Supervisor Bill Postmus.

"I believe it is nothing more than an attempt to plug a hole in the state budget to make up for fiscally irresponsible deficit spending. The bottom line is: it's not fair to charge our residents for irresponsible fiscal management by the state, and we shouldn't stand for it."

**-MORE-**

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The counties have been informed that state Legislature leaders have agreed to repeal the tax as part of state budget negotiations. Until the state budget is formally adopted, however, the new fire tax is slated to be collected on the next property tax bills sent to owners of land within a state responsibility area. The fire tax is \$35 per parcel.

The state would require the counties to collect \$70 per parcel in this first year, because the state did not act quickly enough to get the tax on last year's tax bills.

In San Bernardino County, about 125,000 parcels would be taxed to generate about \$8.75 million.

"This state fire tax is based on the mistaken belief that private property owners within state responsibility area lands benefit from state fire protection services at the expense of the general tax paying public," said Riverside County 3<sup>rd</sup> District Supervisor Jim Venable. "This is simply not true. In reality, 90 to 95 percent of all private property owners within SRA lands are provided with fire protection services through paid or all-volunteer fire departments that are funded by local taxpayers."

No new fire services would be provided by the state. These tax funds would be used to finance existing services.

"We greatly appreciate the work of state firefighters who protect our communities," said San Bernardino County 2<sup>nd</sup> District Supervisor Paul Biane. "However, it is irresponsible of the state to add a fire tax on citizens who are already paying a tax for fire services. It will confuse people who will see two levies for fire protection on their property tax bills. Then it will anger property owners when they learn that their additional funds will not increase the fire protection services provided to their community by the state."

Representing the Inland Empire in Sacramento on Tuesday were Anthony Adams, senior analyst for Supervisor Postmus; Marshall Riley, field representative for Supervisor Biane; and Mary Moreland, senior legislative analyst for Supervisor Venable.